



**A SPACE FOR HOPES AND DREAMS:
ARTS AND MUSIC AT LACDMH PROGRAMS**

Visitors to DMH Mental Health Centers around the County may be surprised to find clients participating in and enjoying many creative activities, arts, music and drama. Are these really part of mental health care? Yes, they are!

Participating in a creative activity contributes in many ways to mental wellness:

1) On the most basic level, arts and music are positive, joyful experiences in lives that have often been sad and fearful.

2) Through art and music, the mental health client can express difficult feelings in intuitive, non-verbal ways.

3) By engaging in performance arts like music and improvisational theatre, the client, who may often be inhibited about public behavior, learns to move freely and open up dialogue with others without embarrassment or ridicule.

4) Art, music, and drama inspire clients to hope for a better way of life and confidence that they *deserve* something better.

Joella March, who has family experience with mental illness, has been bringing the arts to Centers around the County for 16 years. When she volunteered to paint a mural at a Santa Monica shelter, she had an epiphany realized she might be able to make a real difference in the residents' lives. Her Art of Daybreak Multi-Arts Outreach Program brings dance, Improv, and arts activities several times a year to Long Beach, San Pedro, South Bay and other MHCs. AOD MAP is funded from grants and with County funds, although the instructors have also volunteered, feeling they learn from their work as well as the clients.

I do see a sense of empowerment, I'd say a sense of confidence, a building of community and a sharing. When we're making art, it's really exciting that we can all kind of talk and share. We always learn from our students. – Joella March



The instructors have seen how participation in their classes helps clients develop confidence and self-knowledge and helps free them from some of their inhibitions and fears.

Kara Masters leads a dance class at South Bay Mental Health Center.

Dance is a way and movement is a way for people to ground in their bodies and feel connected and free and relaxed and peaceful and energized. If they're on medications, it's often numbing...and this gives them a chance to reawaken their senses. Like, I'm not numb, I am here, I am feeling. – Kara Masters

There was a person a few years ago here, an older person, who came up to me in tears because he said, “My whole life, I didn't know I was funny;” and yet he was delightful in the group...and people would laugh and it was great. He'd never played, so that was a huge discovery for him that he was actually funny. – Tracy Burns, AOD Improv Instructor

The Latino Mental Health Outreach program, under the direction of Julio Celada, is another Countywide program emphasizing arts engagement. At the Latino Arts Celebration on May 21, 2013, visitors were able to enjoy paintings and craftwork and watch musical, dance, and dramatic presentations given by Latino clients from every part of Los Angeles.



Dancing and Music at the Latino Arts Celebration



They are sharing how they are getting better with their state of mind, their self-esteem, and their self-worth by sharing their experiences in paintings, in the theater, in the music, and by dancing, going to yoga, and other activities. – Julio Celada, LACDMH Mental Health Services Coordinator

Many Centers develop their own arts programs. At Edelman MHC, for example, a yearly Art Show showcases clients' work in painting, sculpture, and jewelry design; while actor Brook Sylvann leads an Improv Comedy workshop which helps his students learn to express trust and openness in a relaxed, fun way.



Sherwood Brown, Mental Health Services Coordinator, explores the Edelman Art Show exhibits with a visitor.

Improv workshop at Edelman is led by Brook Sylvann

Many people have goals, desires, dreams, and they don't always play out the way that we think they're going to play out... Something tragic happens to your life. It's that dark night of the soul experience. Everything stops. The goal of a group like the Improv Comedy group... is to try to help people reestablish dreams and hopes. – Sherwood Brown, Wellness Center Coordinator, Edelman MHC



Several times a year, LA Philharmonic violinist Robert Gupta and violist Zach Dellinger bring music into the lives of Downtown Mental Health clients, many of whom are living on the streets or in nearby shelters. Gupta first conceived of Street Symphony when he began teaching violin to Nathaniel Ayres, the homeless “Soloist” that Steve Lopez met on Skid Row.

I began to see not only how deeply talented Nathaniel was, but also the layers and breadth and depth of his mental illness. – Robert Gupta

Gupta was inspired by the idea of sharing classical music with others like Nathaniel; he and his colleagues have played at the Midnight Mission Shelter, the LA County Jail, Veterans with PTSD and Juvenile Hall, as well as at Downtown MHC.



Violinist Nathaniel Ayres

What we're finding as musicians... is it's a real chance to connect on a human level with our audiences. And it creates a space of openness... that is a place of healing and a place of compassion and a place that doesn't come with the brunt of judgment and stigma.

So I wouldn't go as far as saying we know how music is healing people. I think that is a little bit messianic to say that, but it certainly allows for a space to be opened where real dialogue can begin about understanding the nature and the humanity of mental illness and how close it is to our hearts. – Robert Gupta



**Street
Symphony at
Downtown
MHC,
December
2012**

So often our audiences, we encounter them initially in a state of very deep depression. And the second that we start playing music, it's like a switch goes off and we see our audiences light up. We've had some comments even from our social workers who are at the mental health clinic, who say that some of the best times to have therapy sessions are right after our concerts. We see a lot of tears; we see a lot of joy as well. And we see a side to the clients that I think a lot of the therapists haven't seen themselves. – Robert Gupta

The best part of the concert for me is knowing there is a better way of life. – Steve, Downtown Mental Health Clinic